

# Elmo Ellsworth Beach

U.S. Census Bureau Chief and Disability Employment Advocate

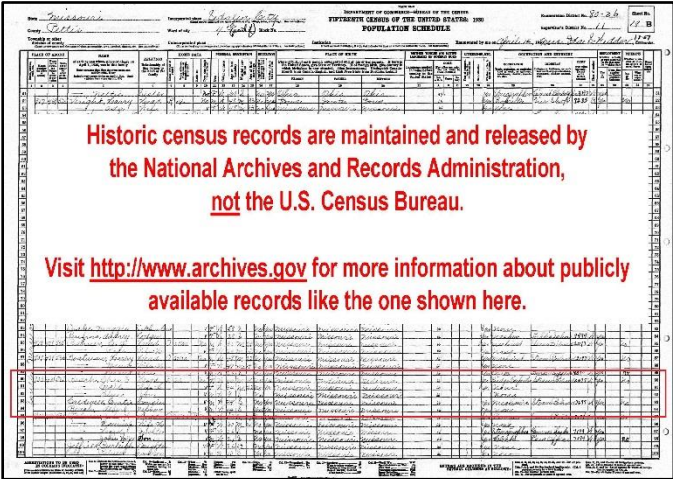


Elmo, center, showing off an award to his coworkers in 1958.  
Counterparts, August 8, 1958.

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of employing people with handicaps and disabilities. Prior to the establishment of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, many disabled war veterans received appointments as assistant marshals, census superintendents, supervisors, and enumerators. As the census became more complex in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a larger office force became necessary to compute and compile census reports. This led to more openings for people with disabilities that did not inhibit office work. Eventually, the Census Bureau fell under several

mandates, such as the 1947 Executive Order 9644, which facilitated the hiring of disabled veterans, well before the national implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Elmo Ellsworth Beach was born on August 1, 1920, in Green Ridge, Missouri, before his family moved to neighboring Sedalia. Elmo’s father, Charles, worked as a carpenter on the Missouri-Texas-Kansas Railroad. After he died in a hit and run accident, Elmo’s mother, Cecil, began working at the local Smith-Cotton High School as a secretary and librarian. Elmo was born with cerebral palsy, a lifelong condition that can hamper physical ability, but he never let that limit him in any way.

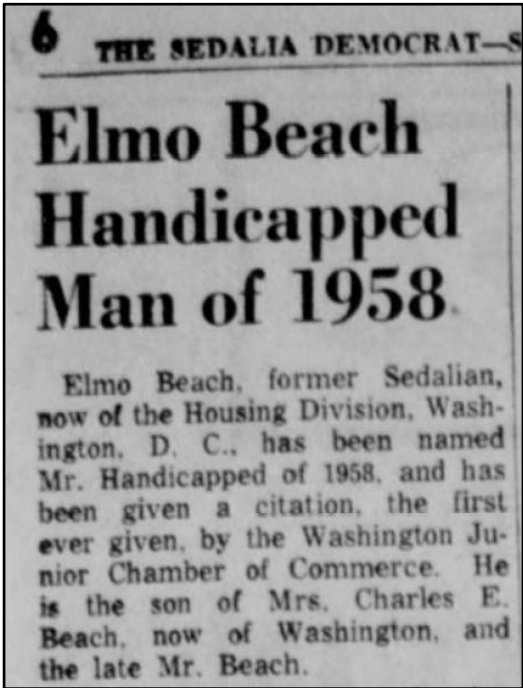


Elmo’s 1930 Census.

At Smith-Cotton High School, where he graduated in 1941, Elmo participated in the Shakespeare club and coached the championship basketball team. Following high school, he attended the Warrensburg Teacher’s College, before transferring to the University of Missouri—where he graduated in 1945 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. In 1947, Elmo and his mother both moved to Washington, DC, to work for the federal government—Cecil as a payroll clerk, and Elmo as a survey statistician in the Housing Division of the Census Bureau, through which he would advance over the next 30 years.



Elmo (back left), with his high school basketball team.  
The Sedalia Democrat (Sedalia, MO), March 26, 1939.



*The Sedalia Democrat (Sedalia, MO),  
September 18, 1958.*

Elmo served in several roles in the Housing Division, such as in the Occupation and Utilization Statistics Branch. By the end of his career with the Census Bureau, Elmo had worked his way up to Chief of the Current Surveys Branch and acted as a subject matter expert when other agencies had questions about census reports. For example, one of the many reports Elmo worked on included the Annual Housing Survey, conducted by the Census Bureau for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He also worked on the housing portions of the decennial census throughout his long census career.

A large part of Elmo’s life outside of his family and career revolved around activism and outreach for the employment and workplace acceptance of the physically disabled. In 1948, a year after his arrival at the Census Bureau, he served as treasurer for the Washington Lodge of the American

Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH). The AFPH and organization president Paul Strachan had successfully lobbied Congress and President Truman to create National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week in 1945, and helped to significantly expand the program in 1947. National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week gradually evolved over the next 30 years into the current National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Elmo joined the National Association of the Physically Handicapped as a charter member of the National Capitol Chapter in 1958, where he served as vice president, and later as president. Elmo also supported the Job Replacement Center of the DC Vocational Rehabilitation Department, and served on the National Council for



**Elmo with the queen of the 1958 Physically Handicapped Fair.**

*The Washington Post (Washington, DC), June 14, 1958.*

Handicapped Affairs. In 1958, as part of his many outreach programs, he chaired the organization committee for a Physically Handicapped Fair, where he received national recognition as “Mr. Handicapped.” For his many contributions, Elmo also received a meritorious service citation from the President’s Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped.

In addition to his extensive public life, Elmo also enjoyed the life of a family man. In 1954, he married Jennie Giordano, and a year later they had a son. In 1978, Elmo retired from the Census Bureau, and enjoyed time with his two grandchildren, his outreach, and his hobbies. On April 7, 1995, Elmo passed away in Erie, Pennsylvania. The Census Bureau is thankful for Elmo’s contributions, and of the contributions of all the members of our diverse workforce throughout the years.



**Elmo’s vice president at NAPH, Virginia Hammond, also worked at the Census Bureau.**

*The Washington Evening Star (Washington, DC),  
June 13, 1960.*